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ABSTRACT

As enrollments continue to decline, principals face new staffing problems, especially problems connected with reduction in force. One forecasting method useful for determining if enrollment will decline is the Keough Indicator Survey Scale, which contains questions about key community characterisitics. Administrators experiencing declining enrollments who use a reduction in force policy based on seniority will face problems such as increasing teacher salaries and age. As an alternative to a seniority-based policy, administrators might employ such criteria as quality of service, experience in a specific area, district need, preparation, and certification. A point system might be used that awards teachers points for such things as seniority, advanced degrees, superior evaluations, and coaching or activity sponsoring experience. Other alternatives that can help solve reduction in force problems include staffing to fit midyear projections instead of fall enrollments, an early retirement system, terminating unsatisfactory teachers, cooperating with neighboring school districts, and retraining faculty for available vacancies. Negative results of reduction in force may include public outcry, large class sizes, and a decline of morale. Perhaps the most important aspect of the principal's responsibilities in dealing with declining enrollment is sensitivity to human needs. (Author/JM)

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DECLINING ENROLLMENTS AND NEW STAFFING PATTERNS FOR THE EIGHTIES

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Edward H. Seifert

For many years America's school districts have fought desperately to cope with mushrooming school enrollments. A tidal wave of youngsters entered the elementary and secondary schools of our nation during the 1950's and 1960's, causing educators to discuss the four B's: bonds, budget, buses, and buildings. This was a period of unprecedented educational growth in America. The children of the "boom" town suburbs and swollen urban areas have journeyed through the schools. What educators face today is another unprecedented period, that being, declining enrollments, surplus school facilities, school building closings, and increased budgets. We are coming face to face with the new era of no-growth.

Dwindling enrollments are not limited to any specific geographic area. While the causes and feasible solutions are different in each school district, the problem is very much the same: PEOPLE.

The result of declining enrollments is that many new teachers will not be able to find employment and many employed teachers will become unemployed. To a lesser degree, decreased enrollment will affect you and me as principals.

In school communities where declining enrollments have already become a reality and where little "planning ahead" was done, the impact of declining student population has resulted in massive program cut-

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backs, staff reductions, course eliminations, and a community that has learned to live with less.

The economics of public school education are overwhelming to the local school patron at their very best. Add to this lack of understanding an increased expenditure request in a time of fewer students and you have the perfect mixture for a citizens tax revolt.

The sad reality of declining enrollments is that there are few ways to hold down spiraling costs. In most school districts increased utility costs, state or federal mandated services, salaries, school supplies and equipment cause increased taxation, even without new programs. Many school districts have had to cut programs and staff just to meet budget constraints created by their taxing base.

The critical concern in this time consuming and laborious problem has to be people--parents, teachers, principals, and students. Declining enrollments present but one more problem to be solved by American educators. How do we accomplish this task? In the next few minutes I hope to provoke a thought or idea which will help you solve your staffing problems.

POPULATION

The drop in birthrates and falling fertility ratios will effect the economics of education and the culture of American society. A change in educational planning is paramount when you consider the population trends in your school district.

Based on Series II U.S. Bureau of Census population projections, elementary school enrollment will continue to decline on a national scale until 1982. The decrease in enrollments between 1975 and 1982 will be 3.4 million. This compares with a fall of 2.4 million students in the time frame 1970 to 1974. Looking beyond 1982 lasting until 1990, Series II projections indicate a slow rise in the elementary population. The total elementary enrollment in 1990, 33.8 million, would still be far short of the peak figure of 37.1 million elementary students in 1969.

The students entering secondary schools during the projection period, that is through 1990, have already been born. These estimates of population are much firmer than those of the elementary school age. The population age 14-17 years is expected to steadily decline until 1990, and from 1976 to 1990 secondary school enrollments will decline.

ENROLLMENT PREDICTIONS

Todays school administrators are faced with the ominous task of looking into their crystal ball to determine the student population, the teacher population, and necessary classroom space in specific areas of the district, ten years in the future, with data that is only valid for five to seven years. This type of data is based on live births and retention rates which are valid for only up to five years.

There are many types of forecast methods which may be employed by school districts. These methods use various types of demographic data but I believe the most useful information comes from a simple technique called the Keough Indicator Survey Scale. This technique allows the administrator to analyze the schools and community and to draw conclusions based on social, financial, and residential factors. Some of the key questions in this survey are:

1. Does your community border a metropolitan area?
2. Did your community develop as part of metropolitan expansion?
3. Is your community an advantaged, with high-priced homes which are escalating in value?
4. Does your community house a high percentage of professional or older people whose homes fulfill their lifetime needs?
5. Is your school system highly respected, and in turn will it attract young families to the community?
6. Does the community have a high level of mobility with families moving in and out? (Who's moving in--families with children or retirees?)
7. Are there areas of middle income housing for young families and thus elementary school aged children?
8. Is there available land for residential development?

If you answered "yes" to the first items and "no" to the remainder then you must assume that a declining enrollment is coming.

In addition to community information the following items concerning schools should be considered:

1. Is there a disappearance of the problem of elementary class size?
2. Do statistics show that the total pupil enrollment at certain grade levels show a consistent decline over a two or three year period?
3. Are there indications that pre-school census figures are a cause for concern?
4. Has feedback from realtors indicated a decrease in the influx of families with pre-school children and young marrieds?

Other factors that may come into play are:

1. Major shifts in residential building patterns.
2. Vacant land
3. Employment trends
4. Social-cultural background and age range of the community.

STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING STAFF

Declining enrollments are having and will continue to have a profound impact on educational staffs at all levels of instruction. It may be our duty as principals in the near future to say to one of our faculty members, "You were a good teacher, the students respect and like you, but I'm sorry, the numbers say we don't need you anymore." We will usually have to tell this to a young teacher

who has few years of seniority in the district. The person's ability as a teacher may have little or nothing to do with faculty retention.

Using the aforementioned plan of reduction in force, we will find that in the future teachers will show an increase in average chronological age and years of experience. Because most salary schedules are based on seniority and experience, this will result in an increase in the average teacher salary. This type of plan will decrease the number of new teachers entering the profession.

The alternatives to a reduction in force policy which advocates the seniority-only basis may employ criteria such as: quality of service, experience in a specific area, district-based need, educational preparation qualifications, and certification. I would go one step further in developing a RIF policy. This policy would include a system of retention evaluation based on a point system. These point values would help determine which teachers would be reduced in a declining enrollment period. This system would reduce faculties by department and/or grade level. The items included for consideration are:

1. 0.5 points for each full school year employed by the district.
2. 0.5 points for each full school year in the Department.
3. If the employee has been assigned under two departments in the past five years prior to reduction, the points earned shall be used in both departments.

4. If an employee has been assigned to two or more departments since employed by the district but has been assigned in only one department for the past five years prior to the reduction, the points earned in other departments shall be used only in the department to which he has been most recently assigned.
5. Four points for a Master's degree in the subject taught, only after four years service in the district.
6. Eight points for a Doctorate in the subject matter taught, only after four years of service in the district.
7. 1.0 points for each school year in which the employee receives an average rating on the principal's evaluation.
8. 2.0 points for each school year in which the employee receives a superior rating on the principal's evaluation.
9. 0.2 points for each school year in which the employee has sponsored or coached at least one extra-curricular activity in the past ten years prior to reduction.

This type of reduction in staff policy puts more emphasis on the principal's evaluation and teacher participation in school activities. This plan can be used with tenured, non-tenured faculty and negotiated agreements. This plan also gives the administrator, in a time of frustration and unrest, another tool upon which to make personnel decisions.

This end result of reduction in force lies with the administration and it shall be our duty as principals to determine staffing requirements on a department by department basis in accordance with the curriculum offered. In my opinion, these aforementioned criteria are a much more educationally sound procedure for reducing staff than seniority-only.

Teacher organizations will continue to include reduction in force articles in their negotiated packages. Many of us have had to work with these RIF agreements and many of us know on a personal basis how much turmoil, mistrust, and malcontent is fostered among the faculty. It is my personal opinion that principals must be involved in the development of a RIF policy either negotiated or non-negotiated. You must get a policy that you can administer and live with. You are the administrator who will work with the faculty on a day-to-day basis. The type of faculty you work with has a great influence on the amount of education the students receive.

There are many effective ways to implement a reduction in force. None of these methods taken singularly are satisfactory for problem solving in any particular school district. As a group, these alternatives give you a plan of attack which will help you solve the RIF problem. Experience has taught us that the following alternatives will save money, reduce staff, minimize terminations, and create new opportunities:

Staffing for Mid-Year Projections - Instead of staffing on beginning of the year enrollments, it is wise to staff on mid-year enrollment projections. In a district with declining enrollment there will be a continuous loss of students throughout the year. This type of staffing can save money and also provide equitable staffing resources for schools that lose students and schools that do not lose students.

Adopt an Early Retirement System - Have older teachers retire early if possible. This type of activity reduces the possibility of terminating young teachers. This allows older teachers to retire in a dignified manner.

Terminate for Cause - A declining enrollment cannot be burdened with unsatisfactory teachers. We as principals must adopt procedures for termination of teachers who do not perform. Remediate and terminate teachers through a system procedural "due process." Termination is a severe action and should be utilized as a last resort.

Work with Neighboring School Districts - It may be possible for several local school districts to work as a consortium to staff their schools. Cooperation is the key to creating an attitude of caring for teachers among responsible school districts. As a principal, you can develop a strong staff morale if the faculty knows you are helping good teachers get relocated if a reduction is required.

Retrain Faculty for Available Vacancies - Asking good teachers to retrain themselves for available positions is one method that principals may use to retain good teachers who like to work with students. Care must be taken to select individuals who are well suited to the type of change in instruction that is needed.

Reduction in force means many things to many publics. To parents RIF may mean writing "support letters" to principals about teachers they feel are being treated wrongly. Some patrons may use the telephone to register their displeasure with decisions. Some people in the community may try to influence principals by applying political pressure either directly on the principal or through elected officials.

As a principal you must prepare for a public "outcry" which will accompany a reduction in force. One effective way to control this highly emotional issue is to prepare and carry out an extensive public information program. This must be done for all citizens. Notify patrons of all possible circumstances and listen to patrons with a sympathetic ear. This concept is a given when working with faculty.

The educational results of a reduction in force is a complicated issue which principals must be able to work through. A logical phenomenon of reduction in force is larger class sizes. An increased class size is an issue which generates a great amount of discussion about student performance, achievement, and educational quality.

There has been no conclusive research to support small class size but public opinion favors small class size.

A second educational drawback to RIF involves the curriculum within each school district. As overcrowded conditions diminish and enrollments decline there exists an unparalleled opportunity to increase course offerings and to incorporate special curricular features due to the availability of space. Personnel and budget cuts almost always shelve this possibility.

The third result of RIF, and perhaps the most important, is a negative impact on overall district climate and morale. This negative morale permeates the entire community. New teachers to the system will be dismissed, talented teachers will be eliminated, instructional aides will be no longer available and a feeling of uselessness and frustration will create additional problems for principals at the building level.

The education of students will suffer, the school districts' credibility will be in trouble, and building level administration will be forced to live with inadequate and sometimes less able staff members.

CONCLUSION

The enrollment decline and staffing patterns for the 1980's challenges the best educational thinking available. This problem

is caused by the fact that no one or two receipts fit all or even a few of the school districts problems in this subject area. Changing staffing patterns is not an economic problem; it is a people problem! Principals, we must use extreme care in consulting with surplus personnel. These RIFed individuals need guidance, support, assurance, and most of all--information.

I am quite sure that declining enrollments will not be the downfall of sound education programs in these United States. As principals, we have dealt with problems as severe as declining enrollments in the past and we have emerged as a stronger force in American education. We need to be involved in long-range planning so that we may tailor our faculties to the educational needs of our communities. Perhaps the most important aspect of our position as principals involved in a declining enrollment situation is that of sensitivity to human needs. The humanness with which we deal with people in an open and professional way will pay dividends many fold in the years to come.